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A Little McLean County History.

By Albert Robinson Greene—A Native Son.

In the year 1837 my father and mother and their three infant sons emigrated from Plainfield, Connecticut, to Illinois. They came by sailing vessel and canal to Altoona, Pennsylvania, and thence by railroad operated by stationary engines over the Alleghenies, and thence by boat down the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers to Cairo, and up the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers to Meredosia, where they landed. It was in the spring season and the rivers were at flood stage. Upon disembarking they were landed in the very top of the warehouse, and their only view of Illinois land consisted of a narrow strip running parallel with the course of the river. On this they were unceremoniously dumped, with the sweeping river behind and a vast expanse of back-water in front (if that is not a paradox), covering the country inland as far as they could see. Their first experience was an interview with a prophet of foreboding and disaster, who had preceded them a few days, and in this short stay had acquired a wonderful fund of misinformation in regard to the country. He urged my parents to forego the attempt to make a home in such a place. He declared that the land along the river was the highest in the State, and, as they could see, this was submerged in places; therefore, the waters had rushed inland and covered the whole country to the Wabash! To the very great regret of this man, my parents declined to accept his advice and decided to continue up the river by the next boat, await the subsidence of the flood and then sally forth to find a spot of dry land upon which to settle. Meantime they would submit to being marooned.

After a wait of a few days they re-embarked and proceeded up the river to Pekin, where they again landed, and taking such conveyance as the exigencies of the times afforded,

struck inland. In due course they came to the hamlet of Delavan, where they were disabused of the fear that Illinois was a sea, and actually discovered farm houses and fields and a most inviting prairie country, interspersed with streams and fine groves of timber.

Moving from one locality to another, as interest or caprice prompted them, they came at last to the New England settlement in McLean County called Mount Hope. There they drove their stakes and rested from the fatigue, hardships and misgivings of the long journey.

Doubtless it would have been impossible for many years past to have found in any nook or corner of McLean County any human habitation so humble as the cabin they built and which for thirteen years was their abode. Two small rooms and a low loft above, reached by a ladder, comprised all they were able to designate by the endearing epithet of home. A row of hollyhocks lined either side of the path that led to the door, and over the door and window rambled a sweet briar my mother had brought from her girlhood home in far-off Maine. Other adornments it had none, except that love was there, and industry, frugality and a high purpose to succeed. This lowly home sheltered the family and oftentimes the wayfarer and the stranger. Also, it became a rural school house, where the children of the settlers gathered to learn the rudiments of an education, and on Sunday it was the little sanctuary where the poor had a poor man's Gospel preached to them. In that cabin home my mother carded and spun the wool and wove the cloth from which she made the clothes for herself and family. To that home came Lincoln and David Davis and Leonard Swett, and standing in its doorway Owen Lovejoy preached to the neighbors assembled for worship.

Among the neighbors who were already on the ground and who gave the new-comers a cordial and sincere welcome were Deacon Morse, Dr. Whipple, Mr. Chapin, Ezra and Shepperd Kenyon, located to the south and west; while but a few miles away to the east were the McFarlands, the widows Pierce and Chase, Simmons, a fiery South Carolinian; and beyond these the Funks of Funk's Grove. Other friends, new or old, were

the Hobletts, the Merriams, Dr. Proctor and Parson Jacob More, who preached on Sundays and ground the settlers' corn at his primitive mill on Sugar Creek on week days.

Bloomington, the county seat, was an ambitious village, but being inland, had but local and limited trade, and found a keen rival in Waynesville, which was equally important as a business center. Pekin, being a river port, was the real metropolis and enjoyed a large commerce.

Early in 1838 my father made a trip with an ox team to Chicago for a load of shingle bolts, the prices at Pekin, which of course included freight and profits, being deemed excessive. Often in after years I remember hearing him and my mother recounting the hardships of that journey, and laughing over my father's positive declaration made at the time, that despite the enthusiasm of a young man by the name of Wentworth, whom he met there and who urged him to make a pre-emption claim in the suburbs of the village, he could see no great future for the town, located as it was in a swamp and on the shores of a lake, which, so far as he could make out, was too shallow for navigation. He said one thing was certain—that it could never become a serious rival of Pekin!

At that time there was a measure pending in Congress for fixing the maximum price of public land at one dollar an acre, a reduction of twenty-five cents over the existing law. It seems incredible now, in view of the present prices of Illinois land and the absorption of the public domain by land-hungry settlers, but it is a fact, nevertheless, that the hope of this small reduction in the price deterred many people from investing in land, even to the extent of their necessities at the time. At one time my father had the snug sum of eight hundred dollars in gold, the proceeds of a bunch of cattle Isaac Funk had added to a herd he was driving to Buffalo, New York, the nearest market. When the money was paid over Funk advised my father to buy a section of land which adjoined his pre-emption claim, reminding him of the fertility of the soil and the certainty of its making him a small fortune some day. But the hope of the enactment of the law whereby the price would be reduced twenty-five cents an acre impelled

him to decline the advice of the best business man in that part of the State. I speak of this not in reproach, but simply to record an historical fact.

On January 16, 1848, my sixth birthday (I remember the date because the measles "broke out" on me on that day) an incident occurred which I will relate in the hope that it will be of interest to other descendants of anti-slavery crusaders of that strenuous time. Very early in the morning I was partially roused from sleep as I lay in my trundle bed by unusual activity in the only other room of the house which served the purpose of kitchen and dining room. Much suppressed conversation, the shuffling of many feet and the aroma of steaming coffee and frying meat, at an hour which seemed to me to be the middle of the night, set me to wondering at the occasion of it all. I was feverish from the illness and could not return to sleep. After a while there was the sound of wheels at the door, a passing back and forth between the house and the vehicle, and then the wagon drove away and silence reigned again. It seemed to me that morning would never come, but at last the streaks of light creeping through the cracks of the walls came as a welcome reward for my waiting, and then I began to wonder when my mother would come tip-toeing in to inquire after the welfare of her sick boy. Then there was a loud "Hello" at the door, which was repeated a moment later in an impatient tone of voice. Somehow the strange voice and its half-angry tone startled me, and the more when I heard my mother answer the call. I wondered why father allowed this. Wrought upon by curiosity and misgiving, I managed to get out of bed and over to the window, where I peeped out. Three men were sitting on horses in the road, and the one nearest to the door was speaking in a loud, imperative, not to say uncivil tone, to my mother. He said they were from Kentucky and were hunting some "boys" who had run away from the plantation and had been tracked to this neighborhood. One was a stout boy, very black, with an evil eye and a scar on his cheek, made by a cut of a whip. The other was taller, a "yaller boy," had been a house servant and was more "likely." He named a sum he would give

for their recovery and then said something about "dead or alive," which made me shiver. He then asked my mother if she knew where they were. She replied that she did not. He then wanted to know if she had seen any such boys as he had described. She said she had not. The leader of the party then held a consultation with the two companions, and turning to my mother, asked the name of the man of the house. She told him. Upon hearing the name the men nodded significantly to each other. Then they asked where the man of the house was at that time. They were told that he was on his way to Orendorff's mill with a grist. Then they wanted to know the direction of the mill, and were told. Then they wanted to know at what time he had started and how much load he had. They were informed that he had been gone a short time and had started early in hopes of getting back the same day. He had quite a load, for himself and some neighbors. If they wanted to overtake him it could easily be done. But first, to satisfy themselves, they might tie their horses and come and search the house. At this the leader took off his hat and waved it low down, almost to his stirrup, and said, "No need to do that, madam," and they turned their horses about and rode away. I remember that the men wore broad-brim white hats, such as I had not seen before. The horses were the handsomest I had seen, and so much different from our old plow horses that I kept looking at them all the time the talk was going on. The riders stroked the long, glossy manes of the sleek animals all the while, and when they left they went in a jump.

I staggered over to my bed and had hardly gotten under the cover when my mother came into the room, and, falling at the bedside, burst into a flood of tears and self-accusations. I remember that she asked the question in her moanings and repeated it again and again, "How can I ever *pray* again?" Presently she did pray, and very much to my enlightenment. She made a full confession to the Lord, and thus it ran: She had grievously sinned, but it was for the sake of two poor wretches escaping from slavery. She had misled and deceived the slave-hunters—had told them a falsehood, but it was for

the sake of the poor and the lowly and the helpless. Also, what was to me an eye-opener at that time, she reminded the Lord that He had himself winked at evil that good might come, and whatever she might have incurred in the way of violating the law, it was for others, and not for herself. Then she got up and spoke to me in the same affectionate old tones and went about her tasks singing. I knew very little at that tender age about the reputed power of prayer, but I knew that she had been talking to God.

In a few days my father returned, and then the family were assembled and his experiences related. He had received word by the grape vine telegraph that a couple of runaway slaves were to be at our house on a certain night, and for him to be ready to carry them on to the next station, which I think was somewhere in the vicinity of Tremont. Some time in the early morning he had arrived and turned his live freight over to his successor, and after resting a day, disposing of the eggs and making a few purchases, had returned at his leisure. As for secreting them in his wagon, they were made to lie down on some hay in the bottom of the wagon box; then more hay was piled on their backs, and on this a few sacks of shelled corn, a sack of oats for the horses and a box of eggs conspicuously on top of all. My three brothers had been sent early to bed, and were not allowed to know anything of the affair, and then, with an ample supply of cooked provisions, the outfitting was complete. He had not met a soul on the road, but along towards morning a couple of horsemen had come up behind him at a gallop and passed without saying a word, but he thought they looked at his load more than at him, and for a minute he was afraid of trouble.

The next year the great rush to California was at its height and many of the neighbors fitted out teams and went overland to the gold diggings. Among those I remember were the Kenyon boys, and I think Dave More, the same man who, as Captain More of a company of rough riders in the Civil War, checked the advance of the rebels on Sherman's right in the opening moments of the battle of Pittsburg Landing. Simmons went by the Isthmus, and when making the rounds

of the settlement to bid his friends good-bye, called at our house and told my father that while he had no use for a d—d Abolitionist, and thought that a man who would run an underground railroad ought to be hung, still, he remembered when he (father) had done him a good turn in arbitrating the damages done by Ike Funk's cattle to his young orchard, and would give him a cordial good-bye, the same as the rest. By which and consequently I have a sneaking suspicion that while my mother may have been able to dissemble a gang of slave-hunters off the scent, their sympathizers in the community had more than a suspicion that Elisha H. Greene, of Mount Hope, McLean County, Illinois—emigrant of 1837—was a successful conductor on the *underground railroad*.

Stevenson, Washington.